

Nadler to Ashcroft: Justice Department Must Investigate GOP Group's Purging of Voter Registration Forms of Democrats

Thursday, 14 October 2004

Washington, DC -- In a letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft, Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Ranking Democrat of the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, joined House Judiciary Committee Ranking Democrat John Conyers (D-MI) and Representatives Melvin Watt (D-NC) and Robert Scott (D-VA) in demanding that the Department of Justice investigate charges that a GOP-funded organization purged voter registration forms of citizens who registered as Democrats. Recent reports allege that the organization, Voters Outreach of America, destroyed registration forms of Democrats in Nevada, Oregon, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, a clear violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Nadler, Conyers, Watt, and Scott called on Ashcroft to respond to their request for an investigation by Monday, October 18. The text of the Representatives' letter follows:

October 14, 2004

The Honorable John Ashcroft

Attorney General

United States Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Ashcroft:

We are extremely disturbed by the reports of recent events that have taken place in Nevada, Oregon, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania regarding voting registrations. We are concerned that these actions are part of an orchestrated plan to deny citizens, registered as members of non-Republican parties, their right to vote. It both shocks and saddens us that four decades after the adoption of the Voting Rights Act, these patterns of discrimination and voter suppression continue. This behavior is intolerable in the 21st Century. We request that you immediately investigate these serious charges, take all steps necessary to ensure that these activities cease, that any individual whose right to vote has been in any way compromised by these unlawful activities is restored, and the Department of Justice takes any and all actions necessary to prevent any further such abuses. We also urge you to pursue criminal and civil actions against the perpetrators where appropriate.

It has been reported that the Voters Outreach of America, a Republican National Committee-funded organization, has collected hundreds of completed voter registration forms per day in Las Vegas, Nevada, and destroyed any forms completed by citizens who opted to register as Democrats. It has also been reported that some out-of-state groups have submitted fraudulent voter registration forms and have refused to register anyone other than Republicans. This interference with the voter registration process is a clear violation of federal law, and a threat to the constitutional right to vote, which remains the core of our democratic system of government.

Section 245 of Title 18, makes it a crime for any person who "by force or threat of force willfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with any person because he is or has been, or in order to intimidate such person or any other person or any class of persons from voting or qualifying to vote...." Additionally,

Section 1974a of Title 42 makes it a crime for any person to willfully steal, destroy, conceal, mutilate, or alter any voting records, including those having to do with voter registration. Finally, a person who knowingly and willfully deprives, defrauds, or attempts to deprive or defraud the residents of a State of a fair and impartially conducted election process, by the procurement or submission of voter registration applications that are known by the person to be materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent is guilty of a crime under Section 1973gg-10 of Title 42. The act of engaging in fraudulent voter registration practices, destroying voter registration forms, or otherwise interfering with the ability of qualified voters to register as prescribed by law are clearly covered by these statutes and demand prompt action by the Department of Justice.

We bring these matters to your attention and ask that the Department of Justice investigate them and act immediately. Given the importance of these issues, and the very short time in which to restore the right to vote to anyone who might have been the victim of these despicable acts, we ask for your response no later than Monday, October 18, 2004. Please reply through Perry Apelbaum of the House Judiciary Committee staff, B351C Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515 (202-225-6906).

Sincerely,

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.	The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress	Member of Congress

The Honorable Melvin L. Watt	The Honorable Robert C. Scott
Member of Congress	Member of Congress

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